

Hebrews Introduction

Sources: D. Edmond Hiebert *An Introduction to the New Testament*; Donald Guthrie *New Testament Introduction*.

1A Authorship.

1B There is no convincing internal evidence of authorship. This issue is simply interesting speculation.

1C Chapter 13 has several first person statements which assume that the readers know the author.

2C However, there is no direct statement by the author.

2B History of Viewpoints:

1C The early authorship accounts (from the middle of the 2nd century), name Paul as the writer of this epistle.

2C Since acceptance into the canon (human recognition of divine inspiration) required apostolic authorship, the acceptance of Hebrews hinged on the assumption of Pauline authorship.

3C One of the earliest known manuscripts, P46, the famous Chester Beatty Papyrus, places Hebrews between Romans and 1 Corinthians, implying Pauline authorship.

4C The majority of early manuscripts place it after 2 Thessalonians, also implying Paul.

5C The Majority Text has the title *hebraïous epistole Paulou*, "Hebrews, an Epistle of Paul"

6C In the East, in Asia Minor where the Majority Text was held and copied, Pauline authorship was assumed from the middle of the 2nd century and confirmed by the middle of the 3rd century. In those churches and by those leaders, Hebrews was grouped with the Pauline epistles.

7C In the middle of the 3rd century some in North Africa concluded non-Pauline authorship, namely Barnabas. The Barnabas tradition came from a desire to support the Montanist heresy.

8C In the early 4th century, Eusebius, a believer in Pauline authorship, noted that some in Rome had begun to dispute that Paul was the author. Note that this is about 300 years after it was written.

9C After some dispute, those in Rome and North Africa concluded that Paul was the author of Hebrews. This remained the standard position for over a thousand years, until the Reformation.

10C Luther, Calvin, and Erasmus all questioned Pauline authorship of Hebrews.

11C Hebrews 13:23 mentions Timothy, 23 Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

3B Why People Reject Paul.

1C Very different style and vocabulary from previous epistles.

1D Answer: Different audience, different time of life, possibly a verbal sermon converted to text by someone else.

2C Different theology.

1D Answer: no way. Perhaps different emphases, but no contradictions. Again the emphases may be explained by the audience.

3C Hebrews 2:2-3 seems to contradict Galatians 1:12:

1D Hebrews 2:2-3, 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

2D Galatians 1:11-12, 11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

3D Answer: The writer of Hebrews says that the Gospel was *confirmed*, not spoken. The two are not necessarily contradictory.

4C The epistle uses the Septuagint only when it quotes the Old Testament; Paul normally uses both.

1D Answer: This might have to do with the recipients. Even as a speaker might ask his readers to open their Chinese Bible because they're in China, so the writer uses the Septuagint because he knows that few of his readers will have the Hebrew.

2A Date. 51-95 A.D.

1B It is not likely to be after 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem. There is no reference to the destruction of Jerusalem, and furthermore 8:4 and 13 imply that temple sacrifices continue.

2B It is not likely to be early, either, since a generation of Christians had passed away, 13:7.

3B The early to mid 60s seems safe enough, without getting too specific. If Rome is the home of the recipients, then 64 A.D., right before the Neronian persecutions, seems reasonable.

3A Recipients.

1B The recipients are Jews who are somewhere in the diaspora of the 1st century A.D. They are able to read advanced Greek.

2B As far as we can deduce from the text, they need further teaching on Christ and how He fits into their preconceived ideas from Judaism.

3B They are in one specific location, Hebrews 13:23, 23 Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.

4B The traditional view is that these are believers in Jerusalem, but the writer's exclusive use of the Septuagint does not allow for this. Rome is more likely, which would also explain 13:24's use of Italian believers as known to the readers.

5B As Hiebert summarizes:

1C "They had received the Gospel from "them that heard" (2:3), that is, from personal disciples of the Lord.

2C They had witnessed "signs and wonders" by the Spirit in their midst (2:4). They have been Christians for some time already (5:12).

3C They had been fruitful in good works, ministering to the saints, and were still doing so (6:10).

4C They had endured "a great conflict of suffering" and had helped those who had been imprisoned for the sake of the Gospel (10:32-34).

5C They had taken "joyfully the spoiling of their possessions" (10:34) as Christians.

- 6C Their former teachers have passed away (13:7) and they are called upon to obey their present leaders (13:17)...
- 7C ...They have experienced spiritual degeneration, having “become dull of hearing” (5:11), and need again to be cared for as spiritual babes (5:12-14).
- 8C There is danger of their drifting away from the things they had heard (2:1).
- 9C They need to be warned against “an evil heart of unbelief, in falling away from the living God” (3:12).
- 10C They have become worldly minded (13:5) and there is a tendency among them to forsake their assembling together (10:25).”

4A Purpose.

- 1B Instruction of Jews regarding the person of Christ and His relationship to Judaism.
- 2B Encouragement of Christians to renew their love for the Lord in Christ.
- 3B Warning passages to ward off divine discipline.

5A Literary Style (from Hiebert). “The epistle to the Hebrews is written in some of the most elegant Greek in the New Testament. “The language of the Epistle,” says Westcott, “is both in vocabulary and style purer and more vigorous than that of any other book of the New Testament.” The vocabulary is remarkably copious, having no fewer than 157 words which are peculiar to it. “The vocabulary, like the style,” Robertson points out, “is less like the vernacular *koine* than any book in the N.T.” The language of Hebrews is that of a practiced scholar. It shows everywhere the traces of care and effort.”

6A Major Divisions.

- 1B Doctrinal, 1:1-10:18;
 - 1C The superiority of the person of Christ, 1:1-2:4;
 - 2C The superiority of the experiential character of Christ, 2:5-4:13;
 - 3C The superiority of the High Priesthood of Christ, 4:14-10:18.
- 2B Practical, 10:19-13:25.
 - 1C The privileges and perils of believers, 10:19-39;
 - 2C The Hall of Fame of Faith, 11:1-40;
 - 3C Application of the Heroes Lives to Present Trials, 12:1-29;
 - 4C The Duties of the Readers, 13:1-17;
 - 5C Personal notes, 13:18-25.